

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-15

WASHINGTON POST
22 July 1983

JACK ANDERSON

NATO Enjoys New Support From France

As irritating as any Parisian waiters, French leaders tend to thumb their noses at the United States and NATO, from which France huffily withdrew in 1966. But behind the scenes, President Francois Mitterrand has been cooperating with NATO much more closely than did any of his recent predecessors.

In fact, White House and Pentagon officials are clucking excitedly over what they already refer to as "France's return to NATO." That's certainly jumping the gun a bit, but there are strong indications that the French under Mitterrand are willing to shoulder a greater share of western Europe's defense burden, and to discuss ways they can integrate with the NATO command.

There are even some who foresee the day not far away when many NATO documents will no longer have to be classified secret for fear that the French would be offended to learn that their forces are taken for granted as part of NATO's strength.

Two years ago I suggested—on the basis of secret assurances Mit-

terrand gave the United States before his election—that the new French president would be staunchly anti-communist. Despite the appointment of four communists to minor cabinet posts, Mitterrand has more than fulfilled those assurances.

Secret CIA analyses report that France is now our most crucial ally in the struggle against the Soviet-supported western European peace movement over deployment of medium-range U.S. missiles later this year. It was Mitterrand, for example, who gently chided the West German parliament for being bullied by the Kremlin into softening its commitment on this point.

The clear need for French military muscle in any NATO-Warsaw Pact showdown is spelled out in a top-secret Pentagon report shown to my associate Dale Van Atta. It noted that Pentagon computers working on hypothetical conventional-war situations in Europe were programmed with a standard assumption that "NATO forces were augmented by all available French forces." A few years ago the French might have called this wishful thinking.

The figures in the report showed that French forces add significantly to NATO's strength, including a one-third increase in its immediate manpower. The French also would supply 1,283 medium tanks, 3,737 other armored vehicles, 917 heavy artillery pieces, 504 land-based com-

bat aircraft, 67 tactical naval planes, 46 combat ships, 21 attack submarines, 20 amphibious vessels and 107 anti-submarine aircraft—a formidable arsenal that doesn't even include the French nuclear weapons.

Signs of France's growing commitment to NATO include:

- Mitterrand's expulsion of 47 Soviets for espionage in April. He has also skipped the once-routine yearly Franco-Soviet summit meetings, and rarely refers to the "special relationship" between the two countries that his predecessors stressed.

- Passage of Mitterrand's five-year defense program, which explicitly acknowledged that western Europe's security is closely tied to the United States.

- French support for U.S. missile deployment in western Europe if the Geneva negotiations fail to gain removal of Soviet SS20 missiles.

- A NATO meeting two months ago in Paris, the first there in 17 years. In one secret meeting, the French gave the distinct impression that they want to increase their coordination with NATO.

Footnote: The CIA has been remarkably accurate in its assessments of Mitterrand over the years. For instance, one report predicted with absolute accuracy that he would be "more willing than Gaullists to tolerate an Atlantic orientation in French policy."